

The Blackstone Canal

The Blackstone Canal Company had little trouble raising money to finance the canal. In less than two days, it raised the \$500,000 needed to meet the estimate for the entire canal's construction. At times, over 1,000 men were engaged in hard, manual labor excavating the beds for the canal's 48 locks. The trench for the majority of the canal had to be dug and reinforced. Carpenters and skilled masons were engaged to build the locks' walls as well as each gate. Stone was quarried and placed so that each lock was ten feet wide and, between its two gates, eighty-two feet long. Each lock aimed to provide an average hydraulic lift of nine and a half feet to give the Blackstone Canal over 451 feet of lift to counter the Blackstone River's rush to the sea.

As much, if not more than other canals of its day, the Blackstone Canal found water to be one of its biggest problems. Spring floods warranted expensive repairs. The still water in the canal froze quickly and prevented its use during winter months. Low water levels made the canal impassable or incited the mill owners' fury. Sometimes they sent their workers to fill the locks with rocks. In one year, mill owners successfully filed 149 claims that the canal had taken too much water, requiring the Blackstone Canal Company to pay almost \$7,500 in damages. >>



Full Circle at 175

In 1825 with money in hand and surveys completed, the Blackstone Canal Company began building a canal between Worcester and Providence. Three years later, the completion of the 45 mile waterway gave the industrializing city of Worcester a path to reach Narragansett Bay. It gave importers and manufacturers in Providence more markets for their goods and helped them compete with powerful Boston merchants.

Investors saw a bright future for the canal. Paralleling the Blackstone River (and even making it part of the canal in some sections), it could be built quickly, and plenty of traffic was guaranteed as the roads were barely ruts and navigating the river was not practical. The canal would decrease costs to consumers and increase profits to the burgeoning entrepreneurs and businesses of the Blackstone River Valley.



courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society



REVOLUTIONS

A PUBLICATION ON THE JOHN H. CHAFEE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Celebrating the Anniversary



We asked historian Al Klyberg, ranger/interpreter at the RI Department of Environmental Management's Blackstone Canal and Transportation Museum located at the Kelly House in Lincoln's Ashton village, about the Blackstone Canal's significance to the Valley.

The canal changed Worcester. With a canal, Worcester now had access to the port of Providence. Providence merchants could now get their goods to central Massachusetts. Prior to the canal's opening, it could cost as much to haul a ton of freight the 30 miles overland as it cost to ship it to England.

The historical significance of the canal, he told us, is that "it opened up Worcester as an inland port and increased the population more than five fold between 1820 and 1850. Second only to the development of steam engines and rail transport later, it was the event that brought immigrants to the area — to work on the canal and to work in the mills." Before the famine in Ireland, he added, "the canal was the source of the original Irish emigration."

The subsequent industrial and community growth along the river meant that 100 years ago there was a greater sense of 'valley' awareness than there is today. Mills in Whitinsville and Hopedale were making textile machinery for the textile companies along the river and beyond the Blackstone Valley."

The changes to the landscape that the canal brought 175 years ago continue to be reflected in the Valley today. Ponds and reservoirs were enlarged to serve the mills as well. From an ecological view, the canal was a catalyst for industrialization and its consequent pollution. "The unexpected dividend," he says, is that the Blackstone Valley is now filled with ponds and waterways—some of which we think are natural, but they're not."

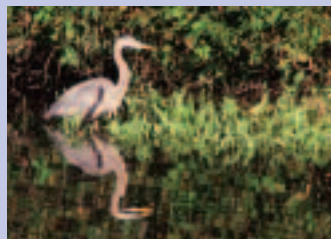
Barge transportation on the canal ceased in 1848. But alongside the Blackstone River, these ponds and waterfalls and reservoirs are serving new purposes: enhancing understanding of our common and our local history, while expanding our recreational opportunities and enjoyment.



The Paddle Club at the canal, Lincoln, RI



Paddlers at River Bend Heritage State Park



The canal and millponds created new habitats that remain in town centers



Better, faster, smoother. Efficient means of transportation facilitated the Blackstone Valley's explosive development 175 years ago. Not surprisingly, the story remains the same today. Improving the highway link between Worcester and Providence with the imminent completion of the Massachusetts Turnpike connector is key to ensuring the competitive economic edge in the Blackstone Valley.

>> The hindsight of history shows us that the Blackstone Canal is a short chapter in the Blackstone Valley's industrial past. Manufacturing — of textiles, machines and consumer goods — would prove the driving force in the new economy. Moving raw materials to the manufacturer and product to the consumer became an unstoppable engine, but one that would continue to evolve. The Blackstone Canal had been in use a mere two years before the first railroad charter was granted in Massachusetts. The canal ceased operations only one year after the Providence & Worcester Railroad opened — allowing the rail company to purchase nearly all of the Blackstone Canal Company's assets.

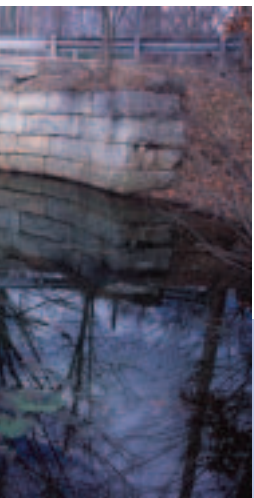
The demise of the Blackstone Canal could be viewed simply as being a casualty of "progress." The Canal's unintended consequences, however, will not let it pass so easily into obscurity.

- For the growing city of Worcester, the building of the Blackstone Canal brought hundreds of laborers from the Erie Canal project and established the city's Irish immigrant work force.
- Reservoirs, created to insure sustainable water levels for both the canal and the mills, improved the Blackstone River's ability to deliver reliable amounts of water that sustained manufacturing along the river for more than a century.
- An earthen towpath was built along and above most of the Blackstone Canal. Today, it offers some of the best routes for the Blackstone River Bikeway that will again connect the cities of Worcester and Providence. The portions of the canal remaining alongside it provide tranquil canoeing and kayaking around rough sections of the river. The Blackstone Canal continues to improve the Blackstone Valley's economy by improving our growing recreational and tourism opportunities.

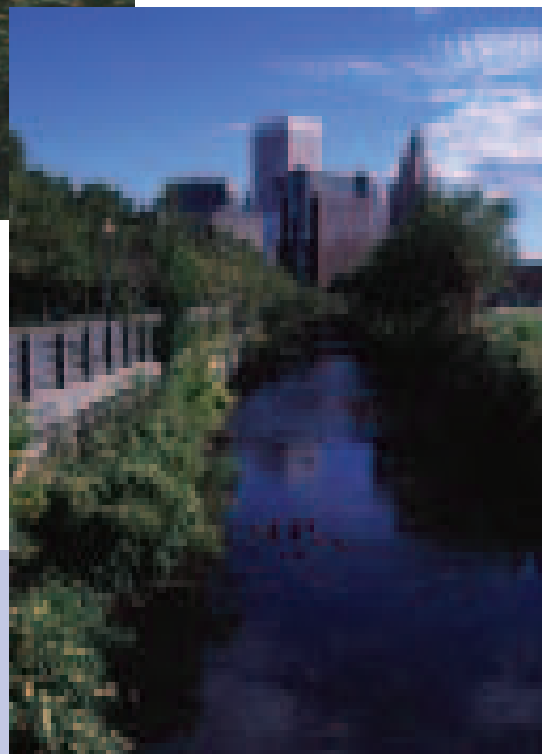


Left: VIP Ethel Halsey introduces visitors to local Lock. Above: This lock is the foundation of the railroad bridge at Larkin Park in Northbridge. Top: Visitor center. The building of the canal was an engineering feat. Each lock was 10 feet wide and 82 feet long.

COVER PAGE : Increasing numbers of Valley residents find the canal tow path a safe, peaceful daily walk. A tour of the Millville Lock with Volunteer in Parks, Steve Giardini. Early view of the Blackstone Canal (today, just south of the Branch Avenue Exit on Route 95 in Providence). Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society.



al flora near the Millville
oad and Church Street
ors at the Millville Lock.
t. There were 48 locks;



Left: The Goat Hill Lock is adjacent to Rice City
Pond in Northbridge. Above: The lock-tender,
Ranger Val Stegemoen in period garb, River
Bend Heritage State Park, Uxbridge. In
Providence, the canal is also the Moshassuck
River; Waterfire celebrations end here.



At left, in Worcester the
canal is buried beneath the
city providing the
infrastructure for a
growing city. Today a
Canal District Committee
is working on a plan to
uncover significant
portions of the canal.
Courtesy of the Worcester
Historical Museum.
Below: The Triad Bridge
is a feature of the Millville
lock tour.



CANAL TIMELINE

1823

Massachusetts and Rhode Island grant charters for a canal from Worcester to Providence

1825

5,000 shares of canal stock are subscribed at \$100 each raising \$500,000 • First shareholders meeting held • Contractors hired in Rhode Island
First lock under construction

1826

Final survey of the canal's route is complete:
48 locks are needed

1828

Lady Carrington arrives in Worcester completing the first passage over the entire length of the canal
The Blackstone Canal Company has a deficit of over \$100,000; establishes a fundraising committee

1829

Blackstone Canal Company issues more stock to cover its debts
Providence & Worcester Canal Boat Company appoints Wilbur Kelly company agent

1830

Canal traffic logs 9,312 trips north to Worcester and 5,530 trips south to Providence • Massachusetts grants a charter for the Boston & Worcester Railroad

1831

Blackstone Canal Bank is chartered

1832

Toll collection peaks at \$18,907 • First dividend is paid out on canal stock at \$1 per share • Ten lock houses built with stores offering supplies and groceries

1834

Blackstone Canal Bank separates from the Blackstone Canal Company

1835

Law suit over water levels is filed by mill owners against the canal company in Rhode Island Court
• Boston & Providence Railroad is completed

1837

Canal charter is modified reflecting an agreement between the mill owners and the canal operators over water rights

1844

Providence & Worcester Railroad Charters are granted

1847

43 miles of P&W RR are completed

1848

Last toll collected on the
Blackstone Canal

1851

All affairs concluding the Blackstone
Canal Company are settled

175th Anniversary Calendar of Events

For more information, * e-mail
info@blackstonecanal.info,

or see each listing

OCTOBER

Friday, 10/3/2003

17th Annual Rev. William Blackstone Ecumenical Breakfast. 8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m. St. Patrick's Church, Church Street, Whitinsville, MA - \$5.00. Guest speaker Al Klyberg, will discuss "The Lady Carrington's first voyage to Worcester along the Blackstone Canal in October 1828." For more information, e-mail above or call 508-234-9555.

Saturday, 10/4/2003

Blackstone Canal Community Day Celebration. 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Worcester Historical Museum, 30 Elm Street, Worcester, MA - Free. Interactive programs, guided tours, presentations, lectures, and more. For more information, e-mail above or call 508-753-8278.

Worcester's Blackstone Connection: A Van Tour of the Headwater Tributaries. 1:00 p.m.-3:45 p.m. Worcester Historical Museum, 30 Elm Street, Worcester, MA - \$8 Mass Audubon Member; \$10 Non-Member. Explore Worcester's waterways, all of which are headwater tributaries to the Blackstone and some of which are/were connected to the Blackstone Canal. Discover how Kettle Brook, Tatnuck Brook, Beaver Brook, Mill Brook, Middle River, Coal Mine Brook and Poor Farm Brook are interconnected, how they are receiving waters from storm water, and how we can reduce polluted runoff. For more information, e-mail dwilliams@massaudubon.org or call 508-753-6087.

Bus Trip to WaterFire in Providence 4:00 pm-10:00 pm Worcester Historical Museum, 30 Elm Street, Worcester, MA - \$21 Adults; \$18 Children under 16. Worcester Historical Museum offers a roundtrip bus ride to Providence, RI to view WaterFire, Barnaby Evans' award-winning fire sculpture installation on three rivers. Festivities begin at sundown (6:23 PM). Grab a bite to eat at one of the many restaurants in the area and stroll along the riverwalk. Only 50 seats available, so reserve your space now. For more information, e-mail above *, or call 508-753-8278.

Sundays, Saturdays, 10/4/2003 - 10/5/2003

Blackstone River Tour Aboard the Canal Boat Samuel Slater 1:00 p.m.-1:50 p.m., 2:00 p.m.-2:50 p.m., 3:00 p.m.-3:50 p.m., 4:00 p.m.-4:50 p.m. Cumberland, RI - \$10. The British Canal Boat *Samuel Slater* will be offering 50 minute tours of the Blackstone River. These tours offer the opportunity to experience an authentic canal boat. Reservations are suggested. Only 12 seats available per hour. Tours depart from Rt. 114, at the corner of Meeting and Broad Street. For more information, e-mail * above or call 800-454-2882.

Tuesdays through Saturdays 10/4/2003 - 11/29/2003

Blackstone Canal: A Highway of Commerce & Industry. Worcester Historical Museum, 30 Elm Street, Worcester, MA - Adults \$5. Under 18 and museum members, free. In celebration of the 175th anniversary of the opening of the Blackstone Canal, Worcester Historical Museum presents an exhibit detailing the creation of the 45-mile waterway that ran from Providence, RI to Worcester, MA. For more information, e-mail above or call 508-753-8278.

Sunday, 10/5/2003

Concert at the Canal. 3:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m. River Bend Farm Visitor Center, 287 Oak Street, Uxbridge, MA - Free. Heritage Homecoming Finale. Featuring the Heritage String Band: Songs, ballads and melodies in memory of "soldiers" and civilians during the terrible war of the rebellion who fought for the Union and worked in the mills of the historic Blackstone Valley and northern Rhode Island, "Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution!" For more information or if inclement weather, please call 508-278-7604.

Sundays, 10/5/2003 - 10/26/2003

Blackstone River Tours Aboard the Riverboat Blackstone Valley Explorer. 1:00 p.m.-1:50 p.m., 2:00 p.m.-2:50 p.m., 3:00 p.m.-3:50 p.m., 4:00 p.m.-4:50 p.m. Market Square, South Main Street, Woonsocket, RI - \$6. This river tour will travel by the Blackstone Canal Tow Path in Woonsocket, RI. aboard the Blackstone Valley Explorer, the first passenger carrying vessel to ply the waters of the Blackstone River and Canal since it closed in 1848. Foliage is brilliant along this stretch of the Blackstone River. For more inf, e-mail BVTourism@aol.com or call 800-454-2882.

Monday, 10/6/2003

Blackstone Canal Opening Celebration at Waterplace Park in Providence, RI. 9:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m. Waterplace Park, Memorial Blvd., Steeple and Exchange Streets, Providence, RI - Free. The program will include Cannon Fire and speakers to commemorate the departure of the first Canal Boat, the Lady Carrington heading for Worcester. It will serve as the kick off of a two-day celebration of the 175th Anniversary of the Blackstone Canal. For more information, e-mail BVRI@aol.com or call 800-454-2882.

Mondays, Tuesdays, 10/6/2003 - 10/7/2003

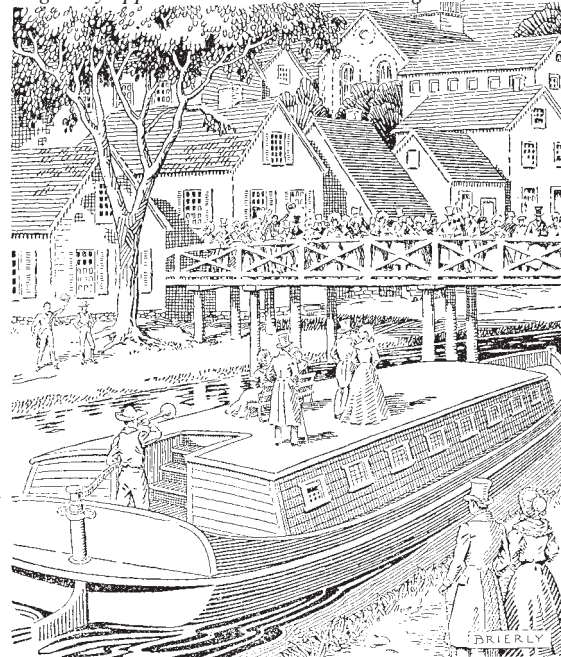
Progressive Canal Walk: From Providence to Worcester. Free. You are invited to join a series of walks on the 175th Anniversary of the opening of the historical Blackstone Canal that connected Providence to Worcester. **9:30 a.m.:** Providence Canal Basin Tour - Water Place Park, Providence. • **10:00 a.m.- 4 p.m.** Capt. Kelly Welcomes the Lady Carrington - Kelly House Museum, Lincoln • **12 noon and 1 p.m.-** Set sail on the Blackstone River and Canal, River Street, Woonsocket • **12:30-2:30 p.m.-** Unlocking the mysteries of the Millville Lock, Central Street, Millville • **2:30 p.m.** Hidden treasure discovered at Skull Rock - Route 122, Uxbridge • **2:00 pm-5:00 p.m.** Meet the lock-tender - River Bend Farm, Oak Street, Uxbridge. • **6:00 p.m.-8 p.m.:** Blackstone Canal Roundtable - Cordis Mill, Grafton Street, Millbury. Please visit www.blackstonecanal.info or call 508-476-7604 for more information.

Tuesday, 10/7/2003

Raise a Ruckus! Blackstone Canal Celebration in Worcester, MA. 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Corner of Worcester Center Boulevard and Thomas Street, Worcester, MA - Free. Join us as we commemorate the arrival of the first canal boat, the Lady Carrington in Worcester. The program will include bell ringing, cannon fire and speeches; reminiscent of 175 years ago on this very date - For more information, e-mail * or call 508-753-8278.

Concert on the "Canal" in Worcester. 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Crompton Park, 50 Canton Street, Worcester, MA - Free. The Canal District Community Development Corporation will sponsor a "Concert on the Canal." Featured musical group will be "Plainfolk," a local jazz band. It promises to be a fun and relaxing night out. Our community is located on the banks of the Blackstone Canal (We celebrate the highlights and the historical significance of the Canal

originally appeared in the Worcester Telegram, 1942



"On Oct. 7, 1828, the Lady Carrington entered Worcester from Providence, the first boat to travel the Blackstone Canal, which ran through Union St. and across the lower end of Front St., where it was spanned by a bridge. On this bridge, a crowd collected to cheer as the boat came in..."
courtesy of Worcester Historical Museum.

and have designated our community as the official Canal District within the City of Worcester. Bring your blankets and lawn chairs and enjoy! For more information please contact Deb Lockwood at the Canal District CDC at (508) 752-2394. For more information, e-mail *

Saturday, 10/11/2003

Fall Foliage Train Trip on the Providence & Worcester Railroad. 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Ann & Hope parking lot, 1 Ann and Hope Way, Cumberland, RI - \$36 Adult; \$19.95 Children under 16. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's roundtrip train ride on the Providence & Worcester Railroad. Ride the rails during prime fall foliage season and hear the history of the Blackstone River and Canal from a Ranger with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Snacks are available for purchase or bring a box lunch. For more information, e-mail BVTourism@aol.com or call 800-454-2882.

Saturday, 10/25/2003

Fall Shopping Excursion To Putnam, CT. 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Ann & Hope parking lot, 1 Ann and Hope Way, Cumberland, RI - \$38 / Adult; \$19.95 Children. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's roundtrip train ride on the Providence & Worcester Railroad. Ride the rails and hear the history of the Blackstone River and Canal from a Ranger with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. There will be a two-hour stop in Putnam, CT for shopping. Snacks are available for purchase on the train or bring a box lunch. For more information, e-mail BVTourism@aol.com or call 800-454-2882.

Canal References

A History of the Blackstone Canal 1823 - 1849. Written by Richard E. Greenwood, 1984. (unpublished manuscript) For the Blackstone Valley Linear Park Project Under the Auspices of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, RI.

A New Order of Things How The Textile Industry Transformed New England. Paul E. Rivard, University Press of New England, 2002.

"Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Blackstone River and Canal Commission and The Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park" (Special Edition). *The River Valley Current*, July 2001.